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TAKING OFF THE WEDDING RING:
THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE NETHERLANDS' CHOICE TO
FORGO A NUCLEAR CAPABLE F-35

by

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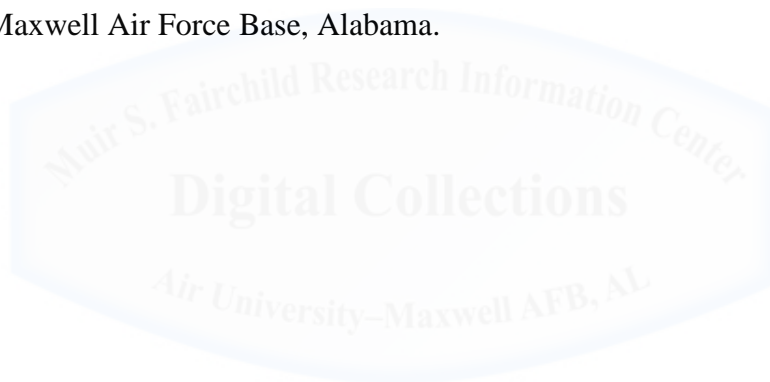
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Biography

LtCol Niels Haarsma joined the Royal Netherlands Air Force in 1990. Following Undergraduate Pilot Training at Sheppard AFB, TX, he moved to Tucson, AZ for conversion training to the F-16. After his commission, flying assignments included duties as Weapons Instructor Pilot, Flight Commander and Operations Officer at Volkel AB, the Netherlands. He also served a tour at the Tactical Leadership Program (TLP) at Florennes AB, Belgium as a Seminar Leader. He is a command pilot with more than 2,700 hours in the F-16, with combat experience in Former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. He most recently served as a staff officer on the F-16 Replacement Project in The Hague, the Netherlands, and is presently attending the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.



Abstract

In November 2013, the Netherlands government decided to opt for the Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) as the replacement aircraft for its F-16s. Dutch parliament, while approving the choice for F-35, however, has indicated that the F-35 should not have a nuclear mission. Currently, the Dutch F-16s are tasked with the NATO nuclear mission, a mission perhaps considered as a relic of the Cold War. By unilaterally discontinuing the capability to deliver non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) with Dual Capable Aircraft in the near future the Netherlands could be jeopardizing relationships with the United States as a major ally and within the NATO Alliance as a whole. Furthermore, the choice made by the Netherlands could lead to an alliance wide re-evaluation of the nuclear task with forward deployed US tactical nuclear weapons, at a time that Europe suffers instability and uncertainty due to Russia's current behavior.

This paper analyses the political processes in the Netherlands, regarding both the decision to buy the F-35 and the nuclear disarmament policy of the Netherlands government framed against the relationships with NATO and the United States. It also considers the international nuclear disarmament agenda as a whole and the current crisis in Europe between NATO, US and Russia.

Introduction

After nearly a decade of political controversy, the Netherlands government decided in November 2013 to opt for the Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) as the replacement aircraft for their current F-16s. Currently, the Dutch F-16 is also tasked with the NATO nuclear mission, a mission perhaps considered as a relic of the Cold War. Dutch parliament, while approving the choice for F-35, has indicated that the F-35 should not have this nuclear mission. By unilaterally discontinuing the capability to deliver non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) with Dual Capable Aircraft in the near future the Netherlands could be jeopardizing relationships with the United States as a major ally and within the NATO Alliance as a whole. Furthermore, the choice made by the Netherlands could lead to an alliance wide re-evaluation of the nuclear task with forward deployed US tactical nuclear weapons, at a time that Europe suffers instability and uncertainty due to Russia's current behavior.

This paper analyses the political processes in the Netherlands, regarding both the decision to buy the F-35 and the nuclear disarmament policy of the Netherlands government framed against the relationships with NATO and the United States. It also considers the international nuclear disarmament agenda as a whole and the current crisis in Europe between NATO, US and Russia. Is this the right time for the Netherlands to be challenging part of NATO's nuclear deterrence by discontinuing its nuclear mission?

Political Processes

The Down Select Process of the F-35 as Replacement for F-16

As the end of the millennium approached, the Royal Netherlands Air Force (RNLAf) started to formulate requirements for the replacement of its F-16 aircraft. In April 1999, a formal requirements statement, a Defense Equipment Selection Process Phase A Requirement Letter

was forwarded to parliament indicating that the F-16s needed to be replaced because the fleet was ageing operationally, technically and economically.¹ The qualitative requirements for the fighter aircraft were based on the Defense Memorandum of 2000, in which the Dutch Ministry of Defense laid out the main tasks for the Netherlands Armed Forces, one of which was the nuclear mission with the F-16.² The next step was to evaluate which new aircraft would be able to meet these requirements. The nuclear mission was not specifically mentioned as one of those requirements, even though the nuclear mission was mentioned in the 2000 Defense Memorandum.

After an in-depth study by the Royal Netherlands Air Force together with two major national institutions, the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) was nominated to be the number one choice for replacing the F-16. However, first, the JSF program had to go through the Concepts Demonstration Phase, in which two competing companies (Boeing and Lockheed-Martin) had to prove the concept for JSF. The Netherlands funded a portion of this program. In 2002, when it was clear that Lockheed-Martin was the company that would be building the JSFs, the program entered the System Development and Demonstration (SDD) Phase. The Netherlands joined as a partner to the SDD program in June 2002, together with Australia, Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States.

The JSF dossier in the Netherlands turned out to be politically controversial, such that a final decision to actually order aircraft was postponed time and again. By 2008, no final decision had been made, but as part of the effort to join the JSF's Operational Test and Evaluation (OT&E) phase, a second comparative study was made to determine which aircraft should replace the F-16. By order of parliament, the Swedish SAAB Gripen NG concept aircraft was incorporated in this study.

The 2008 evaluation had a different approach than the initial study in 2000/2001. Whereas the initial study was set up as a multi criteria analysis, the 2008 evaluation focused on (future) aircraft capability to fulfill a specific main mission set in the foreseen threat environment. These main missions included Offensive Counter Air, Defensive Counter Air, Suppression / Destruction of Enemy Air Defense, Air Interdiction, Close Air Support and Non-Traditional Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance. Again, like in 2000/2001, the nuclear mission was not specifically mentioned, although one could argue that by evaluating an Air Interdiction mission, the nuclear mission was mostly covered in this evaluation, even though an assumption would have to be made that US nuclear weapon certification on non-US aircraft (French Dassault Rafale, Swedish SAAB Gripen NG) would be possible in the future. Also, by defining the mission types as “main” missions, the underlying statement was made that those missions were not the *only* missions the replacement aircraft would have to be capable of, leaving the nuclear mission mostly unmentioned, yet not unaccounted for. The outcome of the 2008 fighter aircraft comparison and evaluation was that the JSF was still the best choice for the Royal Netherlands Air Force. As a result, Netherlands signed the OT&E Memorandum of Understanding and joined the United States and United Kingdom for the operational test phase. One of the requirements to participate in the OT&E was for each nation to bring their own airplanes. As a result, Netherlands ordered two early Low Rate Initial Production aircraft, caveating the buy by stating that no final decision (on the replacement of the F-16) had been made.³

The years following the 2008 decision to join the operational test phase were characterized by delays and cost overruns in the JSF Program. As a result, political debate in the Netherlands about the feasibility of the F-35 as replacement for the F-16 intensified. In early

2012, the Dutch government could not reach an agreement on economic and financial restructuring for extra budget cuts, and was forced to resign.⁴ After the elections to replace the government occurred in September that same year, the fighter replacement became one of the priority items that was negotiated during the government coalition negotiation talks between the two parties that won the elections. The parties failed to reach an accord on buying F-35s as part of the coalition agreement, but did set requirements and a time line for making the final decision by the end of 2013.⁵ The government's main requirement was that the Minister of Defense develop a case for a restructuring of the Armed Forces in light of the financial and economic problems being faced. The replacement of the F-16 would have to be part of this new and restructured force. On Budget Day 2013, the government released the Defense Memorandum 2013 (Memorandum "In the Interest of the Netherlands"), in which the decision to buy F-35s to replace the F-16s was announced.⁶ The buy would be budget limited, both on investment costs and on annual Operations and Sustainment cost, which resulted in a total of 37 aircraft to be purchased.

Once the government had voiced intent on buying the F-35, the parliamentary debate on 6 November 2013 focused on the preconditions of this decision. During a 12-hour long debate, political opponents as well as supporters debated with the Minister of Defense about the restructuring of the Armed Forces in general, and the decision to buy F-35 in particular. As the longtime opponent Labor Party (PvdA) finally came around with a set of preconditions, Member of Parliament of the Socialist Party (SP) Mr. Jasper van Dijk took center stage by setting the precondition that "the replacement for the F-16 should not have a nuclear mission."⁷ Both motions with preconditions were adopted by parliament later that evening.

Both motions must be seen as highly political. Labor Party's motion was necessary to mask the U-turn the party made on the JSF-dossier in the last years of the political debate. Typically, the party's stance towards JSF depended on whether they were part of the governing coalition or not, and therefore this led to much criticism in the national press after the 6 November 2013 parliamentary debate.⁸ The fact that PvdA was now one of the coalition partners, did not lead to surprises. The motion by SP member Jasper Van Dijk must also be seen as largely a move to please the constituency. Due to their relatively small number of seats in the Second Chamber (House of Representatives), and the Labor Party swinging in favor of the F-35, the opposition party was not capable of rallying enough support to stop the decision.

Government response to the preconditions in the Van Dijk Motion

As a result of the vote of 6 November 2013, the Minister of Defense was required to give an official response to parliament regarding the nuclear mission. An official government statement concerning the implementation of the motion came on 14 January 2014, in a letter to the Second Chamber. In this letter the government stated that it intends to adopt the motion by increasing its efforts for international nuclear disarmament.⁹ The letter states that, "The government sees in this motion an encouragement to forcefully continue pursuing its policy aimed at the reduction, and ultimately the elimination of all nuclear weapons – including the non-strategic nuclear weapons in all of Europe."¹⁰ With this statement, the Dutch government clearly links its goals for global nuclear disarmament ("Global Zero") to the issue related to the replacement of the F-16, namely through the conduit of the nuclear mission. It allows for leeway in continued efforts to replace its ageing fighter fleet with the desired candidate, while at the same time acting within the constraints given by parliament. In his motion, Van Dijk had stated that the replacement for the F-16 "should not have a nuclear *mission* (emphasis added)."¹¹ In the

letter the government expresses the hope that the replacement of the F-16 would not...*need* to fulfill a nuclear mission anymore (emphasis in original)...” when it comes into service.¹² It also caveats this statement with two criteria that bound both of these political issues. First, the government states that, when the aircraft come into service, the international conditions should be favorable enough for it to forfeit the nuclear mission. By using this statement, the government seems to place the nuclear mission issue in the broader context of global security and nuclear disarmament. Also, by using the F-35 in-service date as a timeframe, it signals that it is in no hurry to take any unilateral decisions regarding the mission. Second, the letter mentions that “agreements within NATO hopefully make this possible.”¹³ This reference to the alliance again indicates the government’s strong aversion for unilateral action. Also, the reference to “agreements within NATO” must be seen as an indication that the Netherlands’ government values the relationships within NATO and that it is looking for consensus within the Alliance on this issue. The letter further amplifies this bounding criterion by stating the specific order in which the Netherlands’ government intends to approach the matter: “The cabinet is of the opinion that it is important to first seek agreement on NATO’s future nuclear posture within the alliance... and only thereafter derive conclusions on the role of individual member states within this context.”¹⁴

The Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Sub Committee and the discussion on the Netherlands role

Almost simultaneously, two weeks before the 6 November debate on the future of the Netherlands Armed Forces, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Frans Timmermans, made public the Netherlands’ Policy on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. In this policy letter the cabinet outlined its vision towards attaining a world without nuclear weapons (“Global

Zero”). The outlined policy consists of four main trunks. The first main trunk is the promotion of international law and order. The second main trunk consists of the commitment to the prevention of nuclear terrorism and third, reinforcement of adherence to international norms and rules. The fourth and final trunk is the promotion of international negotiations on disarmament and non-proliferation.¹⁵ In the fourth paragraph of the policy letter it reads, “The Netherlands aspires to a reduction and ultimate removal of the NSNW out of entire Europe on the basis of negotiations and reciprocity.”¹⁶ At the same time, the cabinet acknowledged the fact that NATO is still divided on this subject, and that consensus within NATO on disarmament should be reached first.

Evaluating this policy one has to conclude that the Dutch government has no intention of implementing any changes with regards to the nuclear mission of its fighter aircraft any time soon. It states that the government is dedicated to a world without nuclear weapons, including the non-strategic kind. At the same time, it is first and foremost committed to the NATO alliance and has stated that it will not undertake any unilateral steps.

Russia and the Ukraine, does it change matters?

After continued debate in the Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Sub Committee this year, the Minister of Foreign Affairs together with the Minister of Defense wrote a letter to Parliament on 2 September 2014, in which they outlined further clarification on disarmament issues and transparency. Perhaps not surprisingly, in the letter the Ministers refer to the situation in the Ukraine, “The Cabinet finds that since the crisis in the Ukraine the misgivings towards the Russian Federation have increased significantly. Because of this, the discussion about solidarity within NATO and the coherent role of nuclear weapons in our collective self-defense has been given a different perspective. This complicates the accomplishment of the

Cabinet's disarmament agenda.”¹⁷ This reference is significant, because with this statement, the government indicates that this is perhaps not a fruitful time for taking giant steps. Analyzing this letter, one has to conclude that the policy of the Netherlands government is that it still wants to promote nuclear disarmament and transparency on (the location of) nuclear weapons in Europe. However, several statements in the letter lead to the conclusion that Netherlands will, under no circumstance, take any unilateral action with regards to these matters, in line with earlier formulated policy that predates the Ukraine crisis. It concludes:

It has become apparent that there is no willingness within NATO to engage in talks on revealing the total number of NSNW in Europe as a first step to bigger transparency. However, the government will keep exploring the possibilities for increasing transparency and modernizing rules. The crisis in Ukraine makes it difficult to take any concrete steps internationally, but it is of the utmost importance to look beyond the current crisis and to keep striving for a world without nuclear weapons and more transparency. This is what the cabinet will keep working towards.¹⁸

How difficult is disarmament of NSNW?

The Cold War “leftovers”

Ever since the ending of the Cold War the reciprocal reduction of nuclear weapons by both the United States and Russia has been on the international agenda. While progress was made in the early 1990s by reducing or dismantling certain strategic nuclear capabilities, a specific, yet small nuclear capability remained present in Europe. First of all, of course, Britain, with their NATO declared arsenal, and France, with their own nuclear weapons kept their status as nuclear powers. Second, according to Kristensen and Norris, the United States currently keeps nearly 200 B-61 warheads in custody in several European countries.¹⁹ They argue that these weapons are spread out among air bases in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey, and that these nations' Dual Capable Aircraft “are assigned nuclear strike missions with the US nuclear weapons.”²⁰ This may well be true, but the possibility of presence of nuclear

weapons in country has always been a hot topic in public and political debate in the Netherlands. For example, in the 1980s, after NATO's decision to deploy 572 nuclear capable Ground Launched Cruise Missiles to the European continent in response to the Soviet SS-20 threat, widespread protests erupted. On 1 November 1985, the Netherlands government decided to host 48 US missiles despite a 3.5 million signature petition against deployment presented to the government the week prior.²¹ In the end, the missiles were never deployed because of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty of December 1987.²² Apparently, in the 1980s, the government felt that the obligations towards NATO concerning security policy outweighed the opinion of a large part of the population. Ever since, the possibility of forward deployed US tactical nuclear weapons in the Netherlands has remained controversial, yet the alleged existence of nuclear bombs on Dutch soil is generally regarded as a public secret. But never before has the push for disarmament been stronger than now.

What is different now?

Right after the Cold War ended, Dr. Simon Duke, currently a Professor at the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), Maastricht, Netherlands, wrote in an article on the military and political functions of nuclear weapons in Western Europe in 1991,

Nuclear weapons in Europe exist within the context of NATO and the Warsaw Pact... There is, at the beginning of the 1990s, still much uncertainty surrounding the 'new Europe' and the shape of the Soviet Union which will emerge. Since this uncertainty has security implications the arguments seem to point towards a general move towards a minimum deterrent posture, although in practical terms the concept remains ill-defined. Perhaps the strongest argument in favor of the adoption of a minimum deterrent is that it would, in the first place, allow the US a symbolic presence in Europe in addition to a reduced conventional presence, while the future of NATO is being debated. Second, the habits of almost forty-five years, where nuclear weapons have been an integral part of the military and political structure of NATO, will require some time to adjust to the new threats faced by the US and her allies.²³

The absence of a role for nuclear weapons in Europe does not, however, automatically mean that they can merely be wished away. The problem of how to negotiate away dual-capable systems is one that appears to be particularly vexatious.²⁴

This article, written in the immediate aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, reflected on the changing balance of power in Europe after the end of the Cold War. It seems that Dr. Duke identified some key issues that are still current today. Whereas the US has indeed reduced to a symbolic level their conventional military presence in Europe, the notion that the alliance needed “some time to adjust” has turned out to be a gross understatement. Even though reductions have taken place in the nuclear arsenal on both sides, a potent capability still exists 25 years after the Cold War ended, leaving NATO with “a few hundred warheads for the use of allies on dual-capable aircraft.”²⁵ The author, however, did seem to foresee that negotiations on the reduction of NSNW delivered by dual-capable systems (i.e. fighter-bomber aircraft) would prove to be cumbersome. This leads to argue that if NATO and Russia were not able to reach an agreement on mutual disarmament of NSNW right after the end of the Cold War, what would make this likely to occur today? Perhaps, dating five years ago, the United States and NATO began to signal a change in nuclear policy that would have to end in “Global Zero”.

Steps towards “Global Zero”

Immediately after taking office in 2009, US President Barack Obama delivered a speech in Prague in which he signaled a renewed nuclear disarmament effort. Calling upon the status of the United States as a nuclear power and the only nuclear power ever having used an atomic weapon, he stated that the US would take “concrete steps towards a world without nuclear weapons,” and a reduction of the role of nuclear weapons in the National Security Strategy (NSS).²⁶ He also stated, “We cannot succeed in this endeavor alone, but we can lead it, we can

start it,”²⁷ thereby sending a clear signal to Russia as to the intentions of the United States. The President further referred to commencement of negotiations on a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which should ultimately lead to a continued effort for further reduction of *all* nuclear weapons and warheads.

Much of President Obama’s speech in Prague, delivered a mere two months after his inauguration, is indeed reflected in the 2010 NSS: “We are reducing our nuclear arsenal and reliance on nuclear weapons, while ensuring the reliability and effectiveness of our deterrent. We are strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as the foundation of nonproliferation...”²⁸ Even though it can be argued that this process would be time consuming, incorporation of nuclear disarmament using this verbiage must be considered a serious offering by the United States.

NATO followed suit in 2010 with its Strategic Concept agreed to during the NATO Summit in Lisbon in November 2010. This concept echoes much of the terminology that President Obama used in his speech, including a “world without nuclear weapons.”²⁹ One of the most telling statements in the Strategic Concept restates the role of nuclear deterrence in NATO,

Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy. The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.³⁰

Is Russia game for disarmament?

These initial steps by the US and NATO must be seen as the opening to the ball. In fact, reducing NSNW as part of this effort is not as simple as it seems. Recently, scholars have alluded to this arduous process of reducing NSNW. In 2012, scholar Jacob W. Kipp, Adjunct Professor at the University of Kansas, wrote an article called *Russian Doctrine on Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Contexts, Prisms and Connections*. In the last paragraph Kipp paints a bleak

picture about the prospects for a treaty on NSNW. Here, he quotes the Chief of the Section of Analysis and Forecasting of the Department of All-Asian Problems of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Kozin. According to Kipp, Kozin presents a hardline view that identifies five major obstacles for mutual disarmament of NSNW.³¹ Besides mentioning the five obstacles, of which definition of tactical systems, perceived asymmetric deployment posture (i.e. forward deployed US systems) and conventional power imbalance between US and Russia are the most prominent, Kozin also names the US effort to develop a “missile defense shield in Eastern Europe” as an extra complicating factor, further arguing that “there is little prospect for successful negotiations on limiting TNWs [Tactical Nuclear Weapons].”³²

The thinking that cooperation on Ballistic Missile Defense would reduce tension and avoid a new arms race should be considered no longer valid in 2015. Already in 2012, Jacob W. Kipp mentions a “collapse of U.S./NATO and Russian conversations on missile defense.”³³ Also, Mikhail Tsypkin from the Department of National Security Affairs of the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, CA, has written about Russia’s security policy and states that, “When he comes under pressure, Putin tends or pretends – to see a western plot to destroy Russia in order to remove its nuclear arsenal.”³⁴ Considering this statement and other indicators mentioned in his article, it is clear that Russia is not actively cooperating towards mutual disarmament of NSNW, but is rather chasing its own ghost of a superpower. Tsypkin argues, “Once Putin had committed himself to opposing US missile defense, he could not back down without damaging his image as a powerful leader.”³⁵ Russia’s demands and perceived roadblocks will be difficult to overcome in the near term.

Can NATO disarm itself?

In a March 2011 report by IKV Pax Christi, a Dutch peace organization based on Christian denomination, the authors conclude that there are three major hurdles to overcome within NATO to allow profound steps towards the relocation of American NSNW to the United States:

“The most important obstacles to be overcome on the road to TNW withdrawal from Europe are (1) the role of TNW as cornerstone of Alliance cohesion; (2) potential French opposition to supporting a consensus decision; and (3) the decision to first seek Russian reciprocity and the lack of clarity about the time frame in which NATO gives itself the opportunity to do the searching, as well as what will happen if Russia refuses.”³⁶

In their article the authors argue that about half of the NATO countries are proponents of withdrawal of US NSNW from their soil (one of them being the Netherlands) and only three countries are against it, leaving ten countries “not blocking withdrawal” and one “no opinion”.³⁷

But, it can be argued that “not blocking withdrawal” should not be seen as being in favor of withdrawal. Sweeping both of those camps together might make it seem like an overwhelming majority of NATO wants the US to redeploy the NSNW to America, but it could just as well be argued that currently, NATO is actually deeply divided on this issue. The NATO Strategic Concept 2010 specifically mentions burden sharing as one of the key features of the Alliance:

“The security of NATO members on both sides of the Atlantic is indivisible. We will continue to defend it together, on the basis of solidarity, shared purpose and fair burden-sharing.”³⁸ Burden sharing being one of the principles, it would lead to suggest that it also applies to the nuclear mission and therefore, unilateral steps by any NATO member towards withdrawal will not be without consequence. Withdrawal will upset the balance of power in Europe; some even suggested that it could lead to Germany reconsidering starting a nuclear program to balance against Britain, France and Russia.³⁹ This seems highly unlikely now that Germany is actually in

the camp of the countries that are pro-withdrawal, but it is still something to consider when viewing this complex problem through a realpolitik lens. Even if one argues that NSNW might have lost their military purpose since the Cold War, their political value today is still there, perhaps still the glue that keeps NATO together.⁴⁰

The deepening crisis between Russia, NATO, EU and the United States over Ukraine that has emerged over the last year is an extra obstruction in the withdrawal process. In another article, Vladimir Kozin even argues that to solve the Ukrainian crisis, “the USA and its NATO allies should stop any military build-up near Russia’s borders. The US tactical nuclear weapons with relevant infrastructure and the BMD assets must be removed from Europe and brought to the continental USA.”⁴¹ Interestingly, Kozin sweeps the Ballistic Missile Defense efforts by the US and the forward deployed NSNW together as one major roadblock for negotiations. He seems forgetful of the fact that Russia’s NSNW arsenal far outnumbers that of NATO, as Kristensen and Norris estimate the number of Russian warheads at approximately 2,000.⁴²

Further analysis of this crisis falls outside the scope of this paper, however, it should be clear that in these times of tension, unilateral steps by any party towards nuclear disarmament are very unlikely to take place, and therefore one must assume that NSNW will keep playing a definitive role in both NATO’s and Russia’s security policy for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion and Recommendations

M. Elaine Bunn, the current Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy, once said that nuclear weapons are analogous to the wedding ring in a marriage, “...once you start wearing one, it means something entirely different to be seen without it than it does for someone who never wore one.”⁴³ This paper has argued that this analogy cuts to the core of the issue of nuclear disarmament or the redeployment of (US)

NSNW, and that it therefore applies to the extended deterrence principle and the difficulties the Netherlands government has had in formulating its nuclear policy. Even though there is worldwide speak about “Global Zero”, the fact remains that, as senior US officers put it in lectures at the Air War College, “nuclear weapons are used every day.”⁴⁴ Disarmament talks with Russia have stalled and are not likely to make progress anytime soon. At the same time, the Netherlands has chosen the F-35 to replace the F-16, thereby picking a very potent weapon system, especially if you were able to arm it with a nuclear weapon. Sending this type of strong signal to local potential aggressors could go hand-in-hand with open dialogue on disarmament, yet the signal must still be sent, as NATO itself isn’t really ready to disarm at this time as well. Not only have talks with Russia stalled, there is also real tension between Russia and the United States and NATO, which, at the time this paper was written show no signs of détente.

Today, in a world full of challenges, the United States remains Europe’s largest and strongest NATO ally, and therefore burden sharing should be a priority within NATO. While countries such as the Netherlands are investing in new fighter platforms, there should be no discussion on the ability of those platforms to perform a nuclear mission before an alliance wide re-evaluation on NSNW has taken place. Especially with Russia seeking to grow its influence in Eastern Europe, this is not the time for the Netherlands to undertake any unilateral action. Therefore, considering this current balance of power in Europe, it is recommended that Dutch policies remain unchanged, and that it will co-fund the capability upgrade that makes the F-35 a nuclear capable platform.

The nuclear disarmament policies as put forth by the Netherlands government must be seen as very modestly progressive. Even though the ultimate goal of “Global Zero” is mentioned in its nuclear disarmament policy letter, there is also clear language that there will be no

unilateral action by the Netherlands. The opportunistic link that longtime opponents of the F-35 program made between the acquisition of the aircraft and the nuclear mission must be seen as rhetoric aimed to please constituency, and should therefore, in light of the standing Dutch nuclear disarmament policies in general, not be taken as a serious political threat to their commitment to NATO and the nuclear mission at this time. On the other hand, in its policies the Dutch strongly express hopes for a future in which there will be no need for nuclear weapons or missions anymore. While this view of a “Global Zero” world is shared by the Commander-in-Chief of the Netherlands’ biggest ally, it deserves recommendation that the current, cautious policies remain in effect and that the Dutch not shed their wedding ring.



Notes

¹ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *Subcommittee on the Requirements for Replacing the F-16*, Session 1998-1999, 26488 nr.1, Letter to Parliament, 9 April 1999.

² Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *Defense Memorandum 2000*, Session 1999-2000, 26900 nr.2, 29 November 1999.

³ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *Subcommittee on the Requirements for Replacing the F-16*, Session 2008-2009, 26488 nr.178, Motion by Member of Parliament Hamer c.s., 23 April 2009.

⁴ In the Netherlands parliamentary system, whenever the governing coalition reaches a stalemate on a government issue, such as financial restructuring, the Prime Minister will resign the cabinet and call for elections even if the 4 year governing period has not ended.

⁵ Mark Rutte and Diederik Samsom, *Building Bridges*, Government Coalition Agreement VVD-PVDA, 29 October 2012, 15.

⁶ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *Subcommittee on Future of the Armed Forces*, Session 2013-2014, Annex 253075 to 33763 nr.1, Memorandum “In the Interest of the Netherlands”, 2 October 2013, 18.

⁷ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *Subcommittee on Future of the Armed Forces*, Session 2013-2014, 33763 nr.14, Motion by Member of Parliament Jasper van Dijk, 6 November 2013.

⁸ Kranenburg, Mark and Outeren, Emilie van. “If Only the JSF Were as Agile as the PvdA,” *NRC.next*, 7 November 2013, <http://www.nrc.nl/next/van/2013/november/07/was-de-jsf-maar-net-zo-wendbaar-als-de-pvda-1311237>.

⁹ Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal. *Subcommittee on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation*, Session 2013-2014, 33 783 nr.5 Letter to Parliament, 14 January 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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